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FM AMEMBASSY ASMARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0468
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1700
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1876
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUMICEA/JICCENT MACDILL AFB FL
RHRMDAB/COMUSNAVCENT
RUEPADJ/CJTF-HOA J2X CAMP LEMONIER DJ
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE

UNCLAS ASMARA 000298

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/E, DS/IP/AF, DS/TIA/ITA, AF/E
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: GSE SHUTS DOWN EMBASSY ASMARA IFTAR

REF: ASMARA 293

¶1. (SBU) The Eritrean government (GSE) Office of Protocol sent a note verbale on August 27 expressly forbidding the embassy from hosting a planned Iftar meal and showing the film "Islam in America." The note verbale was in response to the embassy's official protest of the August 20th incident which resulted in the assault of a U.S diplomat (reftel) by agents of the Eritrean National Security Organization (ENSO). The note verbale reads, in part:

"the incident mentioned in the Diplomatic Note is under serious review by the relevant authorities... In the circumstances, the presentation to be followed by the Iftar Meal and all other public meetings will not be permitted until the review is finalized."

¶2. (SBU) In recent months, the ambassador has made four attempts to call on the Chief of the Office of Protocol, Mohammed Osman Saad, all of which have been ignored. Immediately following the receipt of the abovementioned note verbale, post sent over a dip note saying ambassador and A/DCM would arrive at the protocol chief's office at 1600 hrs to discuss this issue. After arriving at MFA, nobody was present except for one low-level MFA officer. Despite protestations from this MFA officer, ambassador and A/DCM sat on a sofa in the lobby for one hour waiting for someone with authority to arrive to talk. The MFA officer stated he would attempt to make an appointment for the ambassador and that this issue could be solved through communication, which the ambassador stated was exactly the point he was trying to accomplish by coming directly to MFA. While driving back to the embassy, ambassador and A/DCM stopped at the American Center which had 6 police officers, the police Colonel in charge of protection for all diplomatic facilities, a low-level police supervisor, and two plainclothes ENSO agents in front of it. Ambassador explained that Post had canceled the planned film and Iftar celebration per MFA's note verbale.

¶3. (SBU) Post Comments: Time will tell whether the GSE will actually offer an opportunity to talk and resolve this situation, as well as other bilateral impediments, or whether this is the continued squeeze by the GSE to curtail post operations and attempts at outreach to the Eritrean people.

MCMULLEN